



Korean Outreach Workers Reduce Screening Barriers for Korean Women

Public Health Problem

In 2004, an estimated 4,090 Maryland women will be diagnosed with breast cancer and approximately 760 women will die of the disease. About 220 women in Maryland will be diagnosed with cervical cancer in 2004. A community study of Korean-Americans found that only 10 percent of respondents aged 40 to 69 reported ever having a mammogram, and 54.8 percent of same-aged women in a corresponding study reported ever having a Papanicolaou (Pap) test. According to the U.S. Census, from 1990 to 2000 the Korean population increased from 2,369 to 6,188 in Howard County, Maryland, and from 4,893 to 5,249 in Baltimore County - increases of 161 percent and 7.2 percent, respectively.

Taking Action

Twenty-two local health departments and two hospitals are responsible for implementing the Maryland Breast and Cervical Cancer Program (BCCP). Of those, two local health department BCCPs demonstrate success in recruiting Korean women into the program by employing bilingual Korean outreach workers. Outreach workers that are from the specific population are effective in promoting screening for early detection of breast and cervical cancer by addressing the cultural and language barriers. A variety of factors, including cultural differences, language barriers, transportation barriers, and misperceptions about their cancer risk, contribute to Korean women never or rarely having been screened for breast and cervical cancer. The bilingual Korean outreach workers use a combination of strategies including one-to-one recruitment, public service announcements (PSAs) in a Korean newspaper, outreach to Korean grocery stores, and word of mouth within the Korean community. Additionally, Korean outreach workers translate during screening appointments, case management, and recall.

Implications and Impact

The BCCPs in Baltimore and Howard Counties demonstrate the impact of using bilingual Korean outreach workers to reduce cultural barriers and recruit Korean women for screening. In Baltimore County from January 1, 1992, to August 9, 2000, a total of 83 Asian women were screened, an average of about 9 per year. A Korean outreach worker was hired on August 10, 2000. From August 10, 2000, to April 4, 2003, 225 Asian women were screened, or about 90 per year. This is a ten-fold increase in the average per-year screening of Asian women. About 75 percent (168) were identified as Korean. In fiscal year 2003, 20.4 percent of patient visits in Howard County's Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening Program were for Korean women, compared to only 10 percent in 1997 before a Korean outreach worker was hired. The use of bilingual Korean outreach workers has demonstrated success in decreasing access barriers and enabled many high-risk Korean women to obtain breast and cervical cancer screening that they may not have received otherwise.

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